

# KOREA'S NEW EMPEROR

FRANK G. CARPENTER DESCRIBES AN AUDIENCE WITH HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY IN HIS ROYAL PALACE IN SEOUL.

(Special Correspondence.)

SEOUL, 1909.—I have just returned from an audience with his imperial majesty Yi Chok, the emperor of Korea. It was held in the East palace, one of the four great establishments which his majesty owns in and about Seoul, and as we talked I could hear the hammers of the carpenters who are building a great audience hall nearby for the reception of the future. My meeting with the emperor had been arranged by Viscount Sone, the acting Japanese resident general, at the suggestion of Prince Ito, of whom I had requested an audience when I met him at his villa near Tokio, some months ago. The emperor of Korea is now under the absolute control of the Japanese government. Prince Ito is his adviser, and the country is ruled by Japan, with his majesty as the nominal head. In other letters I shall show whether this is for the good or ill of Korea. Today I write of his majesty alone and of the royal family to which he belongs.

## A BLUE BLOODED MONARCH.

If blue blood means anything Yi Chok ought to be one of the strongest monarchs on earth. There is no doubt but that he is the weakest. Nevertheless, his veins are streaked with a cerulean fluid which began its royal flow a hundred years before Columbus discovered America. Many generations before Shakespeare was born, a hundred years before the first Bible was printed and 200 years before Luther stirred up Germany with his preaching, the ancestors of this young man sat upon the imperial throne and governed their millions of cream-faced, almond-eyed subjects. Yi Chok is the thirty-first ruler of the present dynasty, which began to reign in 1392. His father was Yi Hung, the man whom the Japanese forced to abdicate in July, 1907, and his mother was the famous queen whom the Japanese assassinated shortly after the close of their war with China.

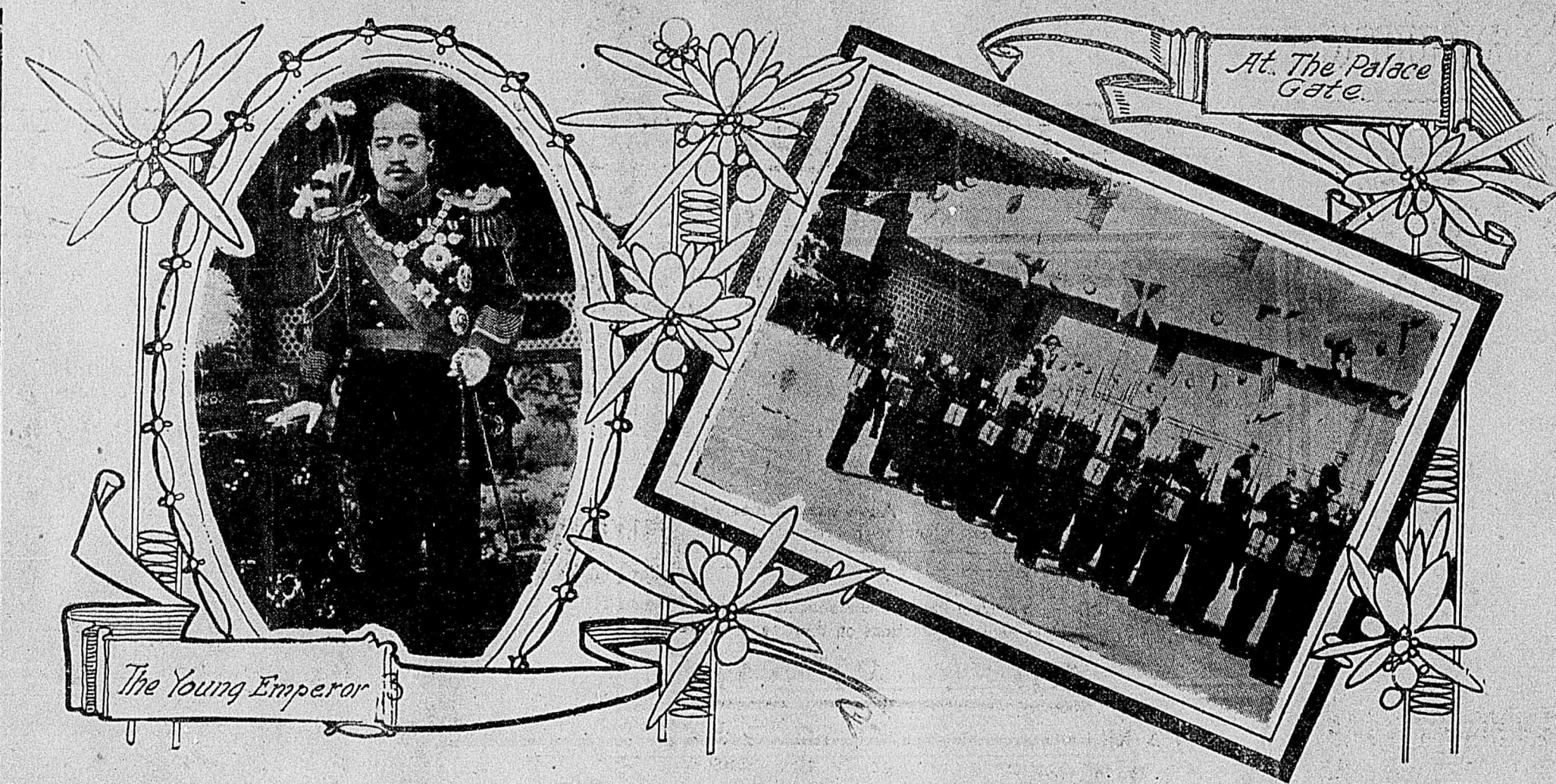
The king and queen were somewhat related to each other, and Yi Chok is the offspring of the intermarriages of many cousins during those past generations. He came into life a weakling, mentally and physically. One of our early ministers to Korea, writing to our state department concerning his audience with this monarch, gave the following in a footnote having seen the crown prince. When the state paper was printed this footnote, which was intended only for the secretary's eye, was added to the bottom of the message. It stated that the crown prince was weak mentally, and that, in the opinion of the minister this was an evidence of the evil effects of the intermarriages of relatives.

His majesty's father has never been noted for strength of character, and he has evidently inherited nothing from his mother, who belonged to the Min family, and was one of the most powerful women who had ever been connected with an Asiatic throne.

## A BABY OF THIRTY-FIVE.

The weakness of the emperor's mind has long been a matter of remark among both Koreans and foreigners. He has little more intellect than a baby, although, it is said, his mind has brightened since he was chosen emperor, now only a little more than a year ago. He is a man of no education to speak of, and his life in the palace, where he has been surrounded by eunuchs and the vicious servants of a depraved court, has not been conducive to mental growth. His first wife was only twelve years of age when she married him, and the present empress is only a few years older. At the time of his last marriage he was a prince, and when a wife was sought for him, according to custom, a notice was sent out to all the nobility of the empire that they must suspend giving their daughters in marriage until the emperor's son had selected a wife. Coupled with this was an order for all who had eligible daughters to send in applications, describing the maidens and showing what they had to offer.

At first only fifteen of the noble families responded, and this, I am told, was on account of the weak mind of the crown prince and his apparent unfitness to manage a household. Then the government officials sent out a second order urging more applications. In reply to this, fifty were sent in, and from these the emperor selected one. The girls represented by them were directed to come to the palace, and in due time they appeared in great state. Each was borne in a gorgeous closed chair, consisting of a box, about three feet square, and not more than that high, in which the maiden sat cross-legged on the floor. These boxes



The Young Emperor

were carried by servants in livery. The main servants of each girl went in front and her slave girls followed behind.

When the procession arrived at the palace the thirty maidens were carefully looked over by the emperor, who has since been deposed, and the poorest ones to the number of fifteen were weeded out and sent home. A day or so later another inspection was made and the marriageable ladies reduced to seven or eight. After this there was a third examination, and a young girl of about thirteen or so, belonging to the noble Yun family, was chosen. Contrary to the usual custom in Korea, which provides that the groom has nothing to do with the selection of his wife, the crown prince himself made the final decision. The girl picked out was the youngest of the whole thirty. She was small of her age, and when the crown prince pointed her out as his choice his father said: "You had better take one of the others. That girl is too small."

"O that," was the reply of his majesty, "she will grow." He insisted upon her at the second selection, and also at the third, and finally got her. He was right as to the growing. She has since grown and has developed into a fine-looking Korean woman. She is very bright, and the Japanese are giving her an education which is in advance of that of any Korean queen of the past. She is studying Japanese under the wife of the vice-minister of the household department. I am told the emperor likes her much, and that the two live together.

## ON THE WAY TO THE PALACE.

Before I go farther, let me tell you about my audience with his majesty and describe how he looks. The time fixed for the interview was 11 o'clock in the morning and I was instructed to appear in full evening dress. I understand that I must go in state, and our consul-general kindly gave me his chair and the official bearers of our government. I started at 10 o'clock in the morning and in the bright sunshine, rode through Seoul in tall silk hat, swallowtail coat, white necktie and the other appurtenances which we at home wear only after 6 o'clock in the evening.

I had to stoop low to get my tall hat into the chair, and ducked when the bearers raised me to their shoulders. The chair was not bigger than a dry goods box, or about four feet cubed, and it was about the same shape. It was open at the front, and the upper part of it was walled with glass so that I could look out as I rode. The chair was upholstered in lilac satin and had a red flannel cushion. It was slung between two black poles about 16 feet

How His Majesty Looks, Acts and Lives—He Has Blue Blood, But Little Strength, And Is Ruled by the Japanese—His Twelve-year-old Wife and How She Was Chosen—Queer Customs of an Oriental Court and How They Are Changing—The Emperor and the Athletes—The Palaces as Repaired by the Japanese.

long, and at each end of these I had two bearers in livery to tote me along. At my side walked the keso, or guard of the consulate, dressed in a long blue gown, fat drawer-like trousers tied at the ankles, and a flat felt hat, upon which was a dingy American eagle. The bearers had blue gowns lined with red, and their white trousers completed the colors of the American flag. The sleeves of the keso were bordered with red, white and blue.

Thus carried, I went through the foreign section, between the high brick walls surrounding the compounds where the missionaries, consuls and other officials live, on by the palace of the deposed emperor, who is now a prisoner under the guard of the Japanese, and passed the finance department and finally came to the residence of Viscount Sone, the acting resident general and the real ruler of the country. After a short chat with him, it was arranged that we were to meet within a half hour at the palace and my bearers were soon again on the way. We now crossed the whole of Seoul, going about two miles, from the palace led up a wide street walled with squalid houses, roofed with thatch or black tiles and interspersed here and there with potted stores, where white-gowned, big-headed merchants waited among the goods and waited for customers.

The street was filled with the traffic of every day Korea, and my keso had to go in advance to clear the way. Bullock carts carrying loads of goods, and even the Jirikishas veered off to the right and to the left. We stopped a moment before we reached the palace, with its double roof of black tiles which forms the entrance to the imperial grounds. The soldiers there had been warned of our coming, and we soon went in and up to the palace. I could look out at a shop that supplied the poorer classes. When visiting his favorite aunt, Fraulein Berntha-Seth, a dignified old maiden lady, the emperor had a servant attend to himself with a bed in the poky little lumber room to which servants were assigned in Berlin up to the recent police regulation providing that they should have a certain hygienic minimum of cubic space.

## MARRIED TWICE.

His deep family affection was manifested in his grief for the loss of his first wife after eighteen months of happy marriage. To escape from his sorrow he lost himself in the terrific task of writing his two volume work on "General Morphology," perhaps his greatest scientific achievement, within a single year, during which time he allowed himself only three or four hours' sleep a day. A second marriage followed several years later at the desire of Haeckel's mother. This has given the professor a peaceful home and three children with the joy and consolation of family life. Some recent rumors about the poor state of Prof. Haeckel's health—owing to his heart trouble—happily are exaggerated. He would have been glad to accept an invitation to the Cambridge celebration of the Darwin centenary—had he received it. None came, however, and he has been sent to scientists who, to say the least, are no more distinguished than himself and to hundreds of scientific societies. It is strongly suspected that clerical prejudice has had a large share in this extraordinary omission. It is quite unjustifiable, for whatever may be thought of Prof. Haeckel's philosophic speculations, not even his enemies venture to deny his great services in the development of Darwinism.

AENEAS O'NEILL

only one story, but the floors are well up, on the ground and they have arched roofs of heavy tiles which extend far out beyond the walls and make them quite picturesque. I cannot tell you how many buildings there are in this palace, but the number is enough to form commodious quarters for his majesty and his retinue. When I say that he has 2,000 servants and that the most of these eat and sleep inside the walls, you will see that they must be extensive.

## PALACES 300 YEARS OLD.

The buildings of today are a strange combination of the old and the new. The rulers of Korea have had a palace on this spot for more than 300 years, and the buildings have been patched up and remodeled from time to time. Just now new structures are being erected, and the audience hall, in which his majesty will receive in the future, will be far different from that in which I met him today. The waiting room, where I was received by the court chamberlains in company with Gen. Ogesaki and the number of other Japanese officers, was evidently the result of foreign graft, and it made me think of the Pennsylvania state house where the furniture was paid for by the inch. Outwardly it was Korean, but the interior was of the cheapest foreign style as to its decoration and furniture. It had green pine doors, such as one buys at a dollar each at our lumber yards, and the door knobs were of the plain white porcelain variety. The paper on the walls and ceiling, did not actually cost those who furnished it more than 15 cents a roll, and the yellow velvet carpet on the floor would be high at \$2 a yard.

In striking contrast with this plainness were the uniforms of the Korean officials and Japanese generals. All were of European cut, but they sparkled with gold lace and brass buttons. The master of ceremonies wore a gold-braided sword at his side, and he had a black hat trimmed with ostrich feathers under his arm. The Japanese army

officers were clad in fine cloth uniforms of a khaki color, but all wore decorations, according to rank and service, ranging in size from the diameter of a red cent to that of a pint cup.

## A TALK WITH THE EMPEROR.

When the time for my audience came the master of ceremonies took me through a long hall into the audience room proper. This was, I judge, about 50 feet square and 100 feet long. The emperor of Korea, several of his cabinet and Viscount Sone stood at the opposite end of the room facing the door. The emperor was in the center of the party, and according to etiquette, I marched forward 10 steps, and then bowed. I then went on until I reached his majesty, when I bowed again. To my surprise, the emperor bowed too, and held out his hand. I took it and we shook. I wish you could have felt that hand. It was as soft as cotton and warm and pleasant to touch.

The man who had been received before me had merely bowed upon his reception and turned away. I supposed this was proper, and started to do likewise; whereupon the emperor motioned me to stop, and the master of ceremonies said that his majesty wished to speak to me. The emperor then asked how long I had been in the country and when I was going away. He wanted to know whether I had an audience with him before, and when I replied that I had met him 14 years ago, at the beginning of the war between Japan and China, and diplomatically added that he had met me since, he smiled as he did then. He perceptibly smiled. This encouraged me to beg him to send a message through me to the United States. The master of ceremonies pretended to submit this request, but whether he did so or not I do not know, as he spoke in Korean. At any rate, his majesty did not answer, but in reply said that he was glad that I had come to Korea, and that he hoped I would have a pleasant tour through Manchuria and China, where, he understood, I was going. This was a signal for leaving, and I backed my way out, bowing betimes.

HOW HIS MAJESTY LOOKS.

As I stood before the emperor I had a chance to study him. He is not bad looking and appears tall in contrast to the Japanese generals about him. He has a large head, rather high over the eyes. He wears a black mustache, just large enough to enable it to be waxed, and his hair, strange to say, is cut short. His complexion is cream yellow, his eyes black, his height 5 feet 7 inches and his weight, I judge, about 170 pounds. When I saw him today he was clad in the uniform of a Korean general, which is now out of fashion, and the contrast of the whole audience with that which I had with himself and the former emperor, his father, was striking. It shows the changes which are going on in Korea.

My last audience was in the palace in which the deposed emperor is now living. The man who introduced me bowed down on his knees and crawled over the floor, bumping his head on the carpet, and then stood up and bowed when he reached his majesty and then got up and bent half double, whispering his questions to the emperor and in the same way conveying his answers to me. That interpreter was a noble Korean, dressed in Korean dress, with a horsehair hat on his head. The master of ceremonies who acted as interpreter to-day stood straight up and looked the emperor in the eye. He wore European clothes and was so dressed that he would not have appeared out of place at a diplomatic reception at the White House.

When I met the crown prince at my last audience he wore a long gown of red silk, with a stiff hooplike belt running around his body, under the armpits. It was so large that it extended out six inches from the dress all around. This belt had decorations of jade and precious stones and it was a mark of high rank. His gown was high at the neck and embroidered with gold medallions as his crown was. There was one of these on each of the shoulders and one each side at about the fifth rib. His feet were shod with heavy cloth boots, and his head was covered with a navy blue cap of horsehair net, which was at least five inches high. This had no brim and it came well down over his forehead. Inside the cap I could see his topknot. His majesty then wore his hair long and put it up in Korean style on his crown. Today the barber keeps it cut to the length of two inches or less, and the horsehair hat has disappeared, while in place of the gown he wears a foreign dress.

During my audience in 1894 this young man, who was then 21, was supposed to be too holy to stand alone, and he had a eunuch on each side of him, who held him up by placing their hands under his arms while he talked. His father, who was then king of Korea, had the same sort of support when I appeared before him, and at that time no prince or noble of high rank walked without having eunuchs on each side to help him along. If he was upon horseback there was a man on each side of the pony to hold his legs in place and keep him from falling. These eunuchs were almost as gorgeously dressed as the crown prince. They wore hats and gowns and big boots and had great gold embroidered squares on their chests and golden buttons behind their right ears, attached to their headgear, and they had long wings on each side of their caps, which stood out like ears, denoting that their owners were always listening for the commands of the king. There was nothing of that kind in our interview today, and the audience, I told, was not different from that of the principal courts of Europe, and the dress of the officials and of his majesty was about the same.

## THE EMPEROR AND THE ATHLETES.

It seems to me that the emperor is much brighter today than when I saw him as crown prince. The Japanese officials tell me he appears to be waking up, and that he shows more and more ability from day to day. The Japanese are ruling the emperor through his cabinet, but there are many papers he has to sign and some documents which require his official sanction. He has been taken out of the palace and has visited one or two of the nearby towns. He does some things which show the existence of humor in his mind. He has heard of them, and knows what is going on in the country. Other day, for instance, there was an exhibition of athletic sports here in Seoul in which all the schoolboys took part. These were foot races and other contests, with appropriate prizes, and the people in general came out to see. About ten thousand were present. The contests created a great sensation and the emperor, hearing of them, ordered the prize winners to be brought to the palace to run before him. As they did so, he was delighted and laughed and applauded. At the close of the races he ordered his highest court officials to come out and run a race among themselves. Many of these men are old fellows, accustomed to being held up by the arms, as I have described.

Some had never done a stroke of work in their lives, and none had ever run before. They tried to beg off, and one or two attempted to hide. They were all dragged out, however, and made to run while his majesty uproariously laughed.

After leaving his majesty I met the vice-minister of the household department, who has charge of all the palaces of Seoul, and is practically the business manager and advisor of the emperor. We went together through the audience hall which is now being repaired, and afterward visited the museum which the Japanese have established in one of the old palace buildings, and the zoological garden, where his majesty has a collection of the Korean fauna. The audience hall is several hundred years old. It is one of the finest buildings of Korea, but it was going to ruin when the Japanese took hold. They are now rebuilding it and adding many improvements. Imagine a great temple with a double roof of heavy tiles, rising more than a hundred feet above the ground. Let it have a ridge roof, curving after the old style of Korean architecture, and decorate its many rafters with carvings painted blue and red. Let wide stone steps, beautifully carved, lead up to the stone platform and on into the hall, and you have the bulk of the structure. At the front and on the sides are long halls surrounding a court which covers perhaps a quarter of an acre. These halls are being reconstructed, and they are to be used for the imperial receptions and dinners. The court is to have a fine garden, in which fountains will play. The interior of the audience hall, which has a floor of one hundred feet square, is being laid with mosaic flooring. It has a ceiling, wonderfully carved, which rises about 75 feet above the floor, being upheld by many red pillars, each as big around as a flour barrel, and in one log as cut from the tree. The carvings and decorations were made by the Koreans of two hundred years ago, but the floors are being put in by Japanese carpenters. When completed this structure will be one of the finest audience halls of the world.

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(Continued from page seventeen.)

is evident in all his acts. Several years ago, when Haeckel had come to Berlin to deliver some lectures, his friend, the Magnesian, the sculptor, hinted that the occasion called for a new suit of clothes, a suggestion to which the astonished professor at first offered a vigorous resistance. His friend, however, at length succeeded in persuading him that the sacrifice was due to Berlin and to his respect for science. The professor, convinced against his will, yielded the point and bought a ready-made suit at a shop that supplied the poorer classes. When visiting his favorite aunt, Fraulein Berntha-Seth, a dignified old maiden lady, the emperor had a servant attend to himself with a bed in the poky little lumber room to which servants were assigned in Berlin up to the recent police regulation providing that they should have a certain hygienic minimum of cubic space.

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